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SUBJECT: 2008 GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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[1](#)1. SUMMARY: The Global Forum on Migration and Development held in Manila October 27-30 was a major international undertaking for the Philippines and was attended by government delegations from 164 nations and 220 delegates from civil society groups. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo delivered the keynote speech at the opening session and Vice President Noli de Castro gave the closing address. Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki Moon opened the conference, emphasizing the importance of migration to the global economy. The Forum's primary purpose was to address migrants' human rights and security, and the delegates concluded that protecting the rights of migrants is a responsibility that must be shared among the countries of origin, transit, and destination. Forum participants sought to underscore the nexus between migration and development, noting that migration benefits the development of both the countries of origin and destination. The roundtables also discussed proposals to address the negative aspects of migration in the countries of origin, including the loss of skilled workers and the impact on families left behind, with civil society groups urging greater rights for "irregular" migrants. The government roundtables supported protecting migrants' rights and expanding the opportunities for legal migration, but also emphasized that migration is not a substitute for development in the countries that send migrants abroad. Both civil society groups and government delegations recognized the important role geography plays in the pattern of migration and acknowledged there could be no "one size fits all" approach to regulating migration. No consensus or support emerged for the Forum to take follow-up actions that were clearly the prerogative of sovereign states, and in the Forum's conclusions the members clearly stated the Forum would not attempt to force states to report or act on its recommendations. In his closing remarks, UN Special Representative for International Migration and Development Peter Sutherland said that the Forum has the full backing of the UN Secretary General, but the Forum should remain outside the formal structure of the UN and continue as an informal, non-decision-making body. The 2009 Global Forum will be held in Athens on November 4-5. Per reftels, Post dispatched an observer/notetaker to the 2008 Forum, but did not otherwise participate. END SUMMARY.

Protecting and Empowering Migrants for Development

[1](#)2. As the host country, the Philippine government chose for the theme of the 2008 Forum, "Protecting and Empowering Migrants for Development." Intense Philippine interest in the Forum stems from the country's status as one of the world's major sources of migrant workers. Some 8.7 million Filipinos living and working overseas comprise nearly 10 percent of the nation's population and nearly a quarter of its workforce, sending home \$15 billion annually in remittances -- equivalent to 10 percent of the Philippines' GDP. Philippine Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs

Esteban Conejos said that with 30 years' experience in managing huge outflows, the Philippines was well positioned to take up the cause of migrants and to share with other governments the good practices and lessons learned.

UN Secretary General: Migration Can Benefit All

13. The presence of UN Secretary General Ban at the Forum's opening session underscored the importance the United Nations places upon the economic, cultural, and social issues associated with global migration. An estimated 200 million people now live outside their country of origin, and Ban sought to highlight the benefits of migration to the global economy. He argued that human mobility "makes our economies more efficient by ensuring the right skills can reach the right places at the right time, and that it could help redress the enormous imbalances that have led to harsh economic inequality." Ban argued that the Forum "must make a special effort to inform and educate people about how migration can be a benefit for all," and how it "should be a tool to help lift us out of this economic crisis."

Forum Highlights Migration Development Nexus

14. The Forum highlighted the strategic nexus between migration and development, with some speakers noting that workers' remittances constitute a larger source of income for developing nations than foreign aid or foreign direct investment. Some participants observed that the current transnational diaspora affects both the countries of origin and the countries of destination. They said that migrants help grow the economies of the countries where they live by paying taxes, purchasing goods, and providing services and also contribute to economic development in their countries of origin by sending remittances home to their families. Several speakers pointed out that while poverty, strife, and natural disaster often induce migration, it is globalization -- with its increased movement of goods, services, ideas, and labor -- that is the major contributing factor.

Migrants Rights Are a Shared Responsibility

15. United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) Minister of Labor Saqr Ghobash expressed a consensus view that the protection of migrants' human rights is a shared responsibility that, if properly carried out, would enable the migrants to maximize their contributions to the economic development of both their host countries and their countries of origin. He continued by saying, "In the past countries of origin and countries of destination frequently had different agendas and conflicting priorities in addressing migration." Minister Ghobash went on to say the U.A.E. and other like-minded states that depend on migrant labor are interested in developing a framework of policies for contractual migrants that encourages their "circular migration." The policies would cover the entire cycle of migration from recruitment and pre-departure preparations in the countries of origin, through employment in the countries of destination, to the return to and reintegration of the migrants in their countries of origin.

Civil Society Views

16. Although not officially part of the Forum, civil society groups held two days of roundtable discussions before the official government meetings and were allowed to present their recommendations and conclusions to the Forum delegations at the closing session. The civil society groups recommended reducing the transaction costs of migration to yield greater economic benefits to both host and origin nations. They suggested that banks and other financial institutions create more innovative savings accounts, funds-transfer programs, and other financial instruments to reduce costs and offer greater choices to migrants for allotting their salaries and remittances. The civil society

groups underscored the need for strong sanctions against traffickers and exploitative employers and recruiting agencies. They also recommended that host and origin countries inaugurate pension portability programs and allow migrant workers access to social security systems. Recognizing that many "irregular" migrants are victimized in transit or detained at the border, they recommended that governments provide repatriation grants for those who want to return home. They did not specify which governments should pay for the repatriation. They were supported in that sentiment by the opening remarks of Undersecretary Conejos, who said, "We must put the interests of the poor and disadvantaged ahead of the rich and powerful. We want to focus on rights, especially of 'irregular' migrants."

17. Some civil society groups recommended that migrants be given dual citizenship rights, the right to vote, and employment opportunities equal to those available to host country nationals. The civil society groups claimed that enforcement alone does not control "irregular" migration and that countries of destination should regularize the migrants by offering more work visas for longer periods and provide a path to citizenship for all migrants who want it. They also recommended that the Forum address the negative impact migration has on labor-exporting nations, particularly as it relates to families left behind and the "brain drain" of skilled workers and professionals. The recommendations were not specific but ranged from conducting studies to using remittances to fund community development projects.

Government Roundtables Report

18. There was a consensus that the fundamental purpose of the Forum was to foster dialogue among governments, but that the Forum would not be responsible for implementing policy. After the two days of the government roundtable discussions, Mr. Sutherland observed, "We listened to each other without finger pointing. There is evident linkage between migration and development. (The Forum) is not responsible for follow-up actions; that is an issue for the individual states, and we do not and will not force states to report or act on (Forum) points." The UN wants to draw more development experts and policymakers into future fora and not concentrate solely on migration. The roundtable reports concluded that protecting the human rights of migrants would benefit not only the migrants, but would also contribute to the development of the countries of origin and the host countries. They noted that globalization, with its increased movement of goods, services, and ideas, also requires the increased movement of labor.

19. The roundtables suggested establishing a common lexicon or dictionary of terms to promote commonality of understanding and the feasibility of issuing diaspora bonds in order to harness diaspora assets beyond merely remittance flows. Their conclusions agreed with the civil society groups that effective measures need to be introduced to reduce exploitative and abusive practices such as migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons. The government roundtables decided to set up an ad hoc working group to collect data and research on migration and development, with a view to achieving more coherence and cooperation among key actors in these areas. They proposed increasing the opportunities for legal migration by establishing migration programs that better match the skills of job-seekers in the developing nations with real jobs in the developed nations.

On to Athens

10. The next Forum will be held November 4 - 5, 2009, in Athens, Greece. Deputy Minister of Interior Athanassios Nakos represented Greece at the Manila Forum and noted during his remarks at the closing session, "Orderly migration, with due respect for the migrants' human rights, is part of -- but not a substitute for -- development." He said that when it hosts the next Forum, Greece will strive to maintain the

momentum created in Manila. The Athens meeting will use the same structural framework of meetings as in Manila and will examine the Forum's linkages with the UN and its relationship with the Global Migration Group and will examine future funding sources and responsibility for follow-up actions.

Forum Will Remain an Informal Consultative Body

¶11. Forum participants did not have a unified view on migration, and their statements featured the demands and concerns of both the labor-exporting and labor-importing nations. Countries such as the U.A.E. that depend heavily on migrant labor for their construction and service industries -- currently 71.4 percent of U.A.E.'s population are international migrants -- advocated policies to manage migration in an orderly manner that would enable them to benefit from contractual labor without allowing the migrants themselves to become a dominant political force within the country. The U.A.E. and other like-minded nations want to pursue policies that lead to circular migration. While there was clearly pressure from some delegates to eliminate the distinction between legal and illegal migration, there was no consensus or support for UN or any other extra-governmental infringement of national sovereignty in dealing with the issue. The Forum also recognized the role geography plays in the pattern of migration and affirmed that each nation needs to formulate appropriate responses to manage its own migration situation. The Forum was united on the need to protect migrants from exploitative and abusive practices and to support bi-lateral and multinational programs to ensure that migration is not used as a substitute for development in the countries of origin. The UN does not intend to bring the Forum into the UN as a formal decision-making body, and there was no recommendation by roundtable participants that the UN should do so.

KENNEY